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PIONEER CHILDREN OF ALBERTA LIVED HAPPY, CAREFREE LIFE SPICED WITH RARE ADVENTURE.

Many years ago a group of children played happily on the banks of the Saskatchewan river at Victoria, or Pakan as it is now known, some eighty-five miles northeast of Edmonton. They gave no thought to the fact that in all time to come there would be no other group just like themselves, for they were the pioneer white children of Alberta. There were no other white children within hundreds of miles, none at all indeed in what is now this province. That was in 1863 and the few years following. The children were Libbie, Nellie, Flora, and Georgia McDougall, daughters of the Rev. George McDougall, pioneer Methodist missionary in Alberta, and Mrs. McDougall.

These little girls did not deplore the fact that they were living in the wilderness, and that they had to make their own amusement. They were happy pioneers with a new world before them in which to live and work and play. Of work they knew very little at that time for they were too small, but they were adepts in the art of play and with the aid of imagination and imitation, made their own games.

PLENTY OF FUN

In winter the children tobogganed down the steep hillsides and there was fine tobogganing in those far away days! The toboggans were usually carrioles, flat sleighs then popular. In an emergency a piece of board was requisitioned. But pieces of board were rare for sawmills were unknown in

western Canada. The first mission house was a crude log cabin in which the McDougall family spent their first winter. The next year the mission house was built, and the boards for it were whipsawed from trees in the woods. The first supply was burned by the Blackfeet Indians who were hostile to the white settlers, and another lot had to be laboriously sawn.

In summer, ball was a popular game with the children. Their balls were made of leather, cut and shaped similar to modern footballs, sewn with sinews and stuffed with moss.

BECAME MIGHTY HUNTERS

The Indian children did not play many games, but the boys were early initiated into the mysteries of the chase. They soon became adept in killing the buffalo with bows and arrows, and later with flintlocks, using powder and balls for ammunition. In the hunt the Indians carried the balls in their mouths, riding at full speed--sometimes racing, and reloading their guns as they rode. Mr. McDougall and his sons also became Mighty Hunters, driven thereto by necessity, for wild meat was the staff of life for the inhabitants of the prairies in pioneer days.

WERE EXPERT LINGUISTS

The Wood Cree tribe of Indians living in the Victoria district, accepted the white people without question. The squaws lavished affection upon the four little fair-haired girls who had come up the river in clumsy York boats, and taught them the Cree language. Nellie and Libbie McDougall, the only two of the four who lived to grow up, proved them-

selves clever linguists, and even today can talk fluently in Cree.

To the great amusement of the squaws the children imitated them in everything they did. In summer when the squaws pounded the chokecherries and saskatoons between stones and dried the paste in the sun, the little girls gathered the fruit and gave it the same treatment. They dried buffalo meat too, after the Indian fashion.

SAW WEIRD SIGHT

Wars between Indian tribes were common affairs. Usually they started with horse stealing. Young Indians would steal horses from other tribes, blood would be shed and war declared informally. When the warriors would return home rejoicing in victory, the squaws would go out to meet them and the McDougall children would follow the procession. The braves were great riders, and as they galloped to camp, they brought with them the scalps they had taken, tied on peeled poles which they held aloft as they sang their weird war songs.

FLED FROM INDIANS

Years later, during the Riel rebellion, Libbie McDougall, then Mrs. Harrison Young, was compelled to flee from the Indians, after they had robbed the fort at Lac la Biche of practically everything, killed her dog, a big brown spaniel, and nailed his carcass to the gate to terrify the family. Mr. Young was in Fort Edmonton at the time.

Starting by night, Mrs. Young and her little family managed to get away from the fort. She herself rode on

horseback with one child in her arms and another tied behind her. Her two elder daughters, Ellen now Mrs. Phillipe Roy, wife of Canadian high commissioner in France, and Edith, now Mrs. A.M. Womacks of Camrose, rode astride another horse, safely tied to the strap which held the blankets in place. The third horse, loaded with a scant supply of provisions, was led by a half-breed maid who carried the baby. Peach Prudden, a Scotch half-breed and his wife, completed the party. For twenty days the refugees traversed the muskeg country lying between Lac la Biche and the junction of the Lac la Biche and Athabaska rivers. The remainder of the journey up the Athabaska river to Athabaska Landing, was made in York boats loaned by a priest. There they stayed for a short time until a team of Hudson's Bay mules and a democrat were secured to bring the party to Fort Edmonton.

Athabaska Landing was then a lonely little Hudson's Bay post which did not even boast a factor. Sometimes in winter a man was sent to take charge for a while, but usually it was without a keeper. At such times the Indians who brought in their furs left them and took what supplies they needed, making nicks in a post by way of receipt. They were strictly honest and never took advantage of their privilege.

Later Athabaska Landing became a prominent Hudson's Bay post serving the Mackenzie and Peace River country until the building of the Alberta and Great Waterways railway.

After the Riel rebellion, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Wood returned to this post and lived there for twenty-five years. For seven years of that time there was no other white woman in the Athabaska country. But that is another story.

NELLIE HAS AN ADVENTURE

Many incidents stood out in the life of the McDougall children, but one which made a lasting impression on the mind of Nellie occurred the following year.

In 1865, the elder sister, Eliza Victoria who had been left at school in Hamilton, joined her family. A year later she married Chief Factor Richard Hardisty and left the mission house at Victoria to make her home in Fort Edmonton. In 1866 Chief Factor Hardisty and his wife were going to Rocky Mountain House to open up a post for trading with the Mountain Stoneys and Blackfeet.

Nellie McDougall, then about seven years old, accompanied her sister to the new post.

The party crossed the Saskatchewan at the mouth of the Sturgeon, riding in a wagon box under which a canvas had been stretched. This accomplished they continued on their way, Mr. and Mrs. Hardisty riding on horseback, little Nellie McDougall alone in a light wagon of the prairie schooner type. Behind came a string of Red River carts bringing the supplies, and the famous McDougall harmonium, the first in the North West territories, purchased with nuggets of gold which James Gibbons and Sam Livingstone had given to the little girls, to show their appreciation

of Mrs. McDougall's kindness to them. As Mrs. Hardisty was the only member of the family who could play, it seemed fitting that the harmonium should go with her.

THE LONG TRAIL

Alone in her light prairie schooner, Nellie soon got over the sense of novelty which upheld her for the first few hours. It was indeed a "long, long trail" with no friendly farm houses on the way, no other wayfarers to meet and greet. Sometimes the riders would forge far ahead of her, and the carts with their heavier loads would fall far in the rear. Then Nellie would be left alone, monarch of all she surveyed, and a lonely little monarch as she steered her chariot of state along the seemingly endless trail. Sometimes she fell asleep and forgot her troubles for the time, but the awakening to find herself alone was less pleasant and spoiled the memory of the sleep.

RETURN JOURNEY WORSE

On the return journey in April, 1867, the trails were in worse condition than on the outward journey. The harmonium had to be brought back on horseback, also little Nellie. A teepee was folded up and tied on a pack horse and Nellie was tied on top of that. The horse was an old buffalo hunter trained for the chase but without any consideration for the feelings of a seven-year old rider. When the pack train was stopped that the packs might be adjusted, the horse would lie down. When the train came to a river, the horses would plunge through, and Nellie's horse

seemed to plunge more desperately than the others regardless of the terror of the little rider.

About half way between Rocky Mountain House and Fort Edmonton, the ice was worn away in the middle of the river they had to cross, and the horses had to plunge from the shore ice down to the river bottom, ford the stream, then scramble up unto the ice at the other side. At this place the Indians had placed a snare trap earlier in the season, with willows arched above. Under this arch the travelers passed. Mr. Hardisty riding astride, bent forward easily and went under without difficulty. Mrs. Hardisty following, was less frotunate. Riding on a side saddle she could not bend so readily, and was caught by the trap, dragged off her horse and badly hurt. The men made a travois upon which she was conveyed to Edmonton and Nellie took her place in the side saddle to her great joy and contentment.

HAD PRETTY FROCKS TOO

Children in those days were dressed quite as comfortably and attractively as they are today. Their underwear was made of soft flannel and their dresses of fine French cashmere or wool plaids. Coats were fashioned from Hudson's Bay blankets. Knitted stockings and warm moccasins, with duffel or "nips" inside kept their feet warm and dry. The duffel was an inner moccasin made from blanket cloth and shaped to the foot. In summer sunbonnets adorned their heads. In winter woolen hoods defied the coldest wind to find its way into their little ears. Mrs. McDougall made

all the clothing for the family by hand. Furs were not worn then or until many years later.

ROAST LYNX VERY GOOD

Feasting was not unknown when the west was young, though the delicacies were largely wild meats, game and fish. When Nellie McDougall spent Christmas at Rocky Mountain House in 1866, the Christmas feast consisted largely of a fine roast lynx! But with appetites whetted by an out of door life, roast lynx or pemican to which white sugar and currants had been added, was very good.

After the first year, the meat diet was varied for Mr. McDougall made a garden and it thrived. He also grew some barley which was pearled and dried and converted into meal. The latter process fell to the lot of the children who sat on the ground grinding the barley in coffee mills. This coarse meal made excellent Johnny cakes, and with dried Saskatoons added for currants, was a food for the gods. There was a little sugar too. This was brought from afar in the form of a pyramid of loaf sugar, and when mother required some, the children chipped it off with a knife and smoothing iron. But they did not chip every day. Sugar was a luxury for occasions.

SORE DISAPPOINTMENT

The summer previous, when it was decided that Nellie would accompany her sister to Rocky Mountain House and incidentally visit her in Fort Edmonton, en route, she anticipated many pleasures when she came to the home of

the "Great Master," as Chief Factor Christie, then in charge of the fort, was called. There would be such fine meals, she thought. These would be much more wonderful than the simple meals prepared at home by mother. But alas! Her hopes were doomed to disappointment. Greatly to her grief she found that old buffalo meat and pemican hash, all lacking the fine flavor of mother's cooking, were the staples. On Sunday, cakes were made, a plain biscuit, one for each person, none for the plate!

All this happened in the long ago, when the history of western Canada was in the beginning and before anyone dreamed of the throngs of boys and girls who would some day play and work and dream of the greater Canada in the making, of which they would have a part. There were no dull moments in the lives of those children. Looking back over the years, Mrs. Woods and Mrs. Young linger lovingly over the memories of the days when they were children playing on the banks of the Saskatchewan, or studying Cree with the squaws of the tribe. The spirit of adventure entered into later days, which brought much journeying to and fro over the prairies under conditions which would be considered hardship today.

All these experiences are reflected in a great charm which characterizes these two silver-haired women, Mrs. Harrison Young, and Mrs. Leslie Wood, of Edmonton, who have turned back the pages that they might reveal to the boys and girls of today glimpses of the joy of early life in Alberta when they were children.